Realism: the imaginary of mediated reality

Tröhler, Margrit

Margrit Tröhler, Universität Zürich

Realism: The Imaginary of Mediated Reality

Innovations in media technology evoke both fascination and scepticism, as reflected in the often heated debates on the cultural value of innovation. As mechanical and chemical techniques of reproduction, photography and film are considered contingent achievements of industrialisation whereas digital procedures shift the emphasis onto electronic data processing and telecommunication and stand in the context of globalisation. Nevertheless, similar patterns emerge from the discourses accompanying both technical revolutions. Both early twentieth-century film and late twentieth-century digitisation propagated a new type of aesthetic perception, which also gave rise to an altered approach to everyday reality through the medium. My analysis of these debates draws upon early and classical German and French theories of film from the 1910s and 1920s, and confronts these with some positions on new media since the 1990s.

This interest in the history of theory focuses on recurrent *topoi* and paradigm shifts. I start out from the claim that notwithstanding their different anchorings in the history of culture and media, early and late twentieth-century discourses on the shift from one medium to another bear the traits of a foundation myth, whose structure and rhetoric are similar. It would thus seem almost paradoxical that both at the very beginning and at the very end of the twentieth century new media were said to bring about a closer proximity to reality (whether real or imaginary), thereby transmitting the topos of *the medium's provision of better and wider vision* or simply of *enhanced vision*. On the one hand, everyday objects entered into different relationship with the perceiving subject; on the other, the realistically perceived presence of the mediated world sometimes grows into a sense of immersion in representation.[1] As observed, the stance adopted in the corresponding discourses can be either euphoric or sceptical, or indeed negative.

My meta-theoretical analysis focuses on the topos of *the medium's enhancing of vision*. I am particularly interested in the realism of moving images and their dispositives of perception, and thus in what Vanessa Schwartz terms the late nineteenth-century "taste for reality." This manifests itself in the attention paid to everyday things and their simultaneous spectacularisation, which can sometimes assume somewhat fantastic forms, for instance restaging a

naval battle in a detailed, lifelike diorama and this promise of reality thereafter becomming discursively elevated.[2] In what follows, I would like to show how such a "taste for reality" also affects, although in modified form, the debate on the reality effects of film in the 1910s and 20s and of present-day digital images.

That said, however, I would not like to leave unmentioned various other similarities between early and late twentieth-century reflections on developments in media and culture. Thus, film journalism and sometimes also scholarly texts exhibit the following *topoi*: the technological aspect is said to prompt a discourse on the industrialisation and standardisation of art and culture in general; the culture or entertainment industry is linked to the mass character of the respective medium (or its definition), to widespread access to technology (with regard to both production and reception), and to popular pleasure; in this respect, catchwords such as "surface," "superficiality," "dumbing down" and "brutalisation" (of "ordinary" people and especially of youth) are invoked, just as the manipulation thesis (and its conspiratorial aspects) and the evocation of the danger of the indistinguishability between fiction and reality gain steam. Spectacularity and heterogeneity, moreover, are either accused or acclaimed. Besides, a direct causal link is established between the development of media and society, specifically in terms of the overstimulation prevailing in the early twentieth-century modern metropolis and the inauthenticity of social life abiding in its postmodern simulation. Last but not least, the displacement of the written word and of print culture by a burgeoning (audio-) visual register is prophesied; and the question whether the new medium – if it is a medium at all – is an art attains new explosive force in the digital age.[3]

Regarding the current discussion, I would thus agree with Thomas Elsaesser's argument that "the digital has come to function less as a technology than as a 'cultural metaphor' for crisis and transition."[4] On this note, either the above fantasies of rupture and loss are invoked, or the new technology is celebrated as a revolution of all previous forms of representation, just as one could read in the 1910s and 1920s. This leads to one last parallel worth mentioning in advance, namely that both the cinematic motion picture and later the digital moving image are said to be a synthesis of all older arts, which are thus absorbed by the syncretic new medium. In applying McLuhan's notion of "remediation," Bolter and Grusin, among others, already suggested in 1999 that such absorption is not merely a myth, but that such innovations can instead be said to have occasioned the "integration" (although not the complete absorption and dissolution) of existing forms at least since the Renaissance, thus actually altering culture.[5]

The often dichotomous and polarised debate points to the difficulty of (current) theory to deal with the simultaneity of dissimultaneity. Regarding the medium's *enhancing of vision*, the debate divides on the one hand into theories of realism that culminate in total immersion, and on the other into formalist or constructivist approaches that foreground the heterogeneous and the (self-)reflexivity of the medium and thus enhance the distance to the artefact.

Classical film theory and the promise of a new sensibility through the realistic medium

Since current discussion readily returns to earlier approaches, but sometimes reduces these to primitive or naive positions, or indeed instrumentalises them for its own purposes, I would first like to consider some theorems of the 1920s.

Influenced by the idea of a new realism, early twentieth-century film theories are characterised by a heightened attention to things and to everyday life. This emphasis runs through all camps. Beginning with Georg Simmel and Henri Bergson, while the fascination with the concrete and with everyday objects strongly influenced critical reflection on film in Germany and France alike, recourse was, however, always had to the medium. No approach at this time amounts to a theory of mimesis or reflection, in which the photographic moving image

copies the world. Instead, each discusses in its own particular way the relationship between film and reality, or between film and everyday perception, which also comprises the new relationship between objects and humans. All positions are as such concerned with questions of *realism* – although partly separate therefrom, for instance Hans Richter's reflections on abstract or absolute film, or the views taken by Férnand Léger or Germaine Dulac in France. For these anti-illusionist movements, (everyday) objects are also central to the preoccupation with the cinematic dimension, for which the close-up and the detail are the pivotal elements of the defamiliarisation of the familiar and of "New Realism."[6] The principal tension exists between one position that holds that the medium enhances the perception of the world, as a construction of the lifeworld as it were, and another that asserts that only the apparatus, as a prothesis so to speak, teaches us to see. In Germany, the discussion peaked in an altercation between "New Objectivity" (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) and "New Vision" (*Neues Sehen*) (both movements opposed expressionist cinema, which in turn developed its own conception of objects).[7] In France, the arguments of those advocating realism as opposed to those propagating formalism can also be seen to run counter to one another. Closer scrutiny reveals that these positions are complex: both sides of the debate pay enhanced attention to objects, which only the photographic moving image renders visible, so that their realism promises a new sensibility and subjectivity.

Both Kracauer and Epstein (although the former, as a "Realist," argues against Expressionism and the latter, as an "Impressionist," takes issue with Surrealism) at first assert that the mechanical eye of the camera "discovers" and "discloses" "the surface of manifestations."[8] This surface supposedly renders apparent the "indissoluble manifoldness of modern life."[9] What are otherwise "lifeless objects" and "usually invisible things" are captured and, so the argument runs, attain a new existence through film.[10] This quasi-phenomenological stance focuses on the surface of the world and anti-essentialistically encompasses objects and humans – whether these be a hat, a chair, a human foot or face, or indeed a landscape or crowds. Kracauer thus argues that the principal virtue of actors is to be "objects among objects."[11] Similar to Epstein, and later Bazin, he considers the camera because of its "automatic" recording process to be an epistemological instrument. By closing in on the world, he argues, the camera alters how we see it. Close-ups and montage thus enable dehierarchised vision, which in turn reorders the relationship between humans and objects. Or as Herbert Tannenbaum already observed in 1913: "The shadowiness of their nature renders the persons appearing on the cinema screen utterly homogeneous with everything in the phenomenal world."[12] The "physical being" of the pro-filmic thus attains a new quality through its transposition into the medium, and through both montage and cinematic motion: *better and wider vision* means to perceive with the senses, and has become inscribed in the filmstrip through the indexical "affinity" of moving photography with the reality of the "stream of life" (Georg Simmel).[13] What distinguishes Kracauer and Epstein, however, is the function that this discovery and the rendering visible of reality have for cinematic experience. Kracauer, a sceptic, argues that film "should aim radically at distraction that unmasks rather than conceals decay" in order to expose the "disentchantment" (in Max Weber's sense) and "ideological homelessness" of modern metropolitan dwellers so as to guide them toward an awareness of a "rational" existence.[14] Epstein, by contrast, emphasises total immersion; for him, the proximity to detail afforded by the close-up and the delving into a human face assume a mystical complexion, Thus, he writes, "it is not even true that a breath of air exists between us; I eat the visage. It is within me like a sacrament." Epstein nevertheless maintains that this experience of the medium also engenders a new consciousness through film. Couched in a critique of reason, he argues that a "maximum acuteness of the visual" leads the spectator directly and spontaneously to understanding; cinematic experience enables sensual thinking, "for reason always ends up strangling itself."[15]

There is a plethora of different positions, but within the scope of this essay I can merely call to mind some of the general arguments. Béla Balázs and Élie Faure foreground through the cinematic proximity to things the

anthropological interpretation of the renewed magical or cosmic relationship to the world. Supposedly, this mitigates the gulf between the modern subject and everyday reality. Their work probably represents the strongest instance of romantic fantasies of fusion and of a utopia of redemption. For Balázs, who was sceptical about language, "in common speechlessness, [things] become almost homogeneous with people, and thus acquire vividness and meaning."[16] Similar to medieval culture and the fairy tale, the motion picture manages to cancel out alienation in both a "ritual and controlled" fashion:[17] a human face becomes a landscape, and things assume a face, thus rendering the world not only visible but also newly readable. Close-ups bring forth a specific visuality and the flow of montage both shifts and multiplies normal perspective and the human gaze.[18] Such "pansymbolism" and the dehierarchising of vision also decentre everything human, that is, dissolve the boundaries between subject and object, which is celebrated as a liberation.[19] Élie Faure, for his part, hails cinema as "cosmic poetry on a mechanical basis"; here, "universal solidarity," which manifests the "dynamic life of the relations between forms," comes true.[20] Already in 1920, he developed the idea of the "cinéplastique," which thereafter strongly influenced the theories of Delluc, Epstein, Dulac, and Léger.[21] Notwithstanding their differences, the notions of *photogénie* in France (Delluc, Cendrars, Moussiniac, Epstein etc.) and of *physiognomy* in Germany (especially in the work of Balázs) invoke the affective qualities of the moving image, which becomes cinematic "only beyond reproduction" through the valorisation of objects.[22]

This rather phenomenological reasoning is the counterpart of the formalist discourse on ornament. But although Arnheim, the later gestalt psychologist, foregrounds the constructivist aspect of New Vision through the apparatus, he, too, is ultimately concerned with enabling "the new interpretation of a well-known object" through "stronger contact" with the cinematic image.[23] Similar to Benjamin, Arnheim also celebrates the fact that through the motion picture "the human being becomes a prop, coordinated with [...] animals, plants, and dead matter."[24] And if – following Benjamin – "the actor thus becomes a stage property, this latter, on the other hand, frequently functions as actor [...] The film is the first art form capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man. Hence, films can be an excellent means of materialistic representation."[25] This citation also suggests that the new object relation transcends cinema as such.

In summary, all these positions emphasise how – with regard to social and technological development – modern humanity not only suffers from the diversity of the modern world, from self-estrangement, and from the burden of individual responsibility. They also establish that the presentness of the motion picture affords an opportunity to come to terms with what Baudelaire called the "shock of perception." Whether this occurs by means of a sceptical, romantic, or constructive attitude, dehierarchised vision, which the motion picture parades as a modern invention (and which, by further implication, decentres the human being and entails a centering on objects), is essentially experienced as a "reconcilation" with modernity. Such rapprochement can be enlightening or liberating, but it definitely has the potential to alter human consciousness in relation to the world. The notion of cinematic realism is central in this respect.[26] Cinema provides a new approach to things, affording an enlightened desire expression – while remaining forever aware that this is conveyed by a medium. Each assuming a different weighting – a "realistic" and "form-giving tendency" (Kracauer), or "an urge toward representation and ornamentation" (Arnheim) or indeed "a sense of reality and of possibility" (Musil) – all interact, however, to explain the realistic-imaginary reality on screen.[27] The oscillation of this dual perspective becomes evident in both the close-up and the detail; it functions as a tilting phenomenon: the cinematic provision of *enhanced vision* occurs between the material, indexical trace and the genuine cinematic construction of a world. While there is good reason to argue that the early 1920s emphasised "camera reality," that the mid-1920s focused on the construction of an imaginary world, and that the late 1920s foregrounded "theories of montage," all three aspects appear largely at the same time, and are intricately interwoven, in classical theories.

Digital realism and its discursive worlds of imagination

The above emphases within the debate on the cinematic realism (of objects) in the 1920s correspond to three levels of argumentation central to considering the concept of realism in theories of the digital: first, *photographic realism*, which is indebted to the mechanical-automatic recordings of the apparatus and to the ontological definition of the medium; secondly, *imaginary worldmaking* (not only in terms of Sartre's "analogue" of the simultaneously present and absent reference object but also of the realistic "possible world" of theories of fiction)[28] and its illusionistic designing of space; and thirdly, the level of the *medium and address* (so-called enunciation),[29] that is, the gaze, montage, and the narrative techniques guiding us as spectators through the "subjectively" perspectivised cinematic world of objects.

If we now consider the various positions within the debate on the shift from the cinematic medium to digital media, from the outset a heightened attention to everyday objects and to the human face, an effect of physiognomy, once again becomes apparent. This is seen to challenge the capacity of digital technology to realistically fashion worldliness. The examples of Bolter/Grusin and Manovich demonstrate that the striving of electronically generated or modelled images after the greatest possible "true-to-life" imitation of details, such as facial expression and complexion, clouds or leaves, their texture, colour, light effects, and simulated motion might well have prevailed in computer design practice in the 1970s and 80s:[30] as evidence not only of technological progress – which had to serve military and industrial interests, as Manovich emphasises[31] – but also of the aesthetic qualities of the new medium, which were supposed to bolster the illusion of the seamless presence of the virtual world and its immersive force. I would not dispute that especially mainstream cinema and 3D animation aspire to reality enhancement. The effect of such "functionless" details, however, debated under the heading of realism, seems to have emerged chiefly as a theoretical topos – not only in computer science, but also in cultural theory, as suggested by the plethora of opposed strategies of spectacular artificiality, standardisation, and the playing with the conspicuousness of the medium.[32]

These details, which the human figure and its object environment make evident, allow us to understand the often reductionist argumentation of the current discussion of (photographic and digital) realism. With reference to Roland Barthes, William J. Mitchell has posited that through the sheer presence of "functionless details" realistic art works attest that "this is indeed an unfiltered sample of the real."[33] Although Barthes refers to nineteenth-century French literary realism and discusses the "meaningless" and "pointless" comments on details in relation to narrative structure, their "reality effect" is transferred directly onto photography and subsequently onto film, and stylised as an indexical trace of the real.[34] For Barthes, these descriptive details render credible the imaginary world without actually providing representation, because they mark "the resistance to sense" as signifiers without signification, that is, the "resistance of the 'real' (*in its written form, of course*) against structure." He describes these details as the text's construction of *effect*. Barthes, moreover, refuses to name such "pointless details," since they depend on either the context or, as he writes, the respective "rhetorical code" of realism. That is, they are changeable and their effect stands for the historical break with a "probability" that appears obsolete at a given point in time.[35] And even when Barthes's similar concern to describe the effect of the "real" repeatedly approaches photography, he nevertheless conceives it as a paradox, since two messages coexist therein: first, the "message without a code," that is, the "perfect analogue" as a "literal emanation of the referent"; and secondly, the culturally and historically coded message, which can be analysed as "art" or "rhetoric."[36] In the second case, the detail can bear ethnographic witness (even unintened and without concrete meaning, it helps us *see more* than in everyday life, similar to Benjamin's "optically unconscious"); in the first case, it is that which appeals to (or attracts) me emotionally as a spectator, through the distance to history, the separating contingencies of my subjective gaze and the shot.[37] Gunning also

emphasises that Barthes (just as little as Bazin) considers photography "neither a copy [...] nor a substitute." Instead, it is the "sense of an unprecedented visual array, possessing overwhelming detail [...] its excessive 'noise,' which characterizes its realism, as well as its sense of uniqueness and contingency."[38]

Since the subsequent debate on the reality effect of photography often ahistorically limits the "referential illusion" to indexicality, and thus to the causal link to the referent and, by further implication, to its trace in the image, we can no longer perceive the "pointless details" as unwieldy and brittle elements of the sensual, material and media qualities of objects resisting "sense" and presumed transparency, as classical film theory once did. This viewpoint also affects the debate on digital realism, which revolves chiefly around the technologically im/possible lifelike impression of new images.[39] The "iconicity of likeness" becomes equated with indexicality, especially with regard to moving images. Elsaesser speaks of "confused categories" in this respect.[40] Both digital recording and computer-generated images are measured against the alleged truth claim of analog photography, which rests upon the idea of the material trace of the referent that our society appears unwilling to forsake. The attention to the arbitrariness of media objects is completely lost in the process.

Furthermore, the modernist topos of *the medium's provision of better and wider vision* is paradoxically introduced into the postmodernist debate, thereby limiting theoretical debate predominantly to the first of the three above-mentioned aspects of realism, namely photographic realism and the digital photorealism of moving images respectively.[41] Even if this concerns the second aspect – the virtual, imaginary, or magical worlds – or indeed the third – that is, questions of subjectivation, reference is nevertheless made to the photographic and moving cinematic image (and by no means to "normal" physiological perception).[42] Using the critical argument of the digital image lacking referentiality, the difference to indexical-analog recording, which presupposes a causal-continuous connection between image and object, is established. For theorists like Baudrillard, "simulation," as the disengagement from anything that resembles a world in ontological terms, also carried the ethical question about the manipulation of the image,[43] as if photographic evidence had ever guaranteed objective perception and the referential existence of the object.[44] Even if Baudrillard's position is no longer undisputed, the still prevalent deterministic claim that the perfecting of technology amounts to the imitation of optical media and sometimes even to the indistinguishability between representation and the perception of the world, is oriented toward photorealism, as more or less apparent in the writings of Kittler, Krämer, Cubitt or Quintana.[45] For them, however, it is oriented toward its effect on perception: digital technology (in production and/or media use) is said to pursue the dream or the concrete aim of imitating and excelling both photographic accuracy and the abundance of sense impressions. If the medium as such ultimately effaces itself, the *presence* of the world reveals itself in the digital dream. To sustain this myth of transparency – as a "logic of immediacy" or "cult of naturalism"[46] – recourse is thirdly often had to anachronistic cinematographic metaphors. Rodowick has emphasised that notwithstanding the differences between the cinematic and the digital image, contemporary theory gladly returns to Kracauer, Epstein, Bazin, or Barthes to substantiate the immersive realism of representation as a "window onto the world."[47] In the digital context, however, it explains a virtual world that ontologically replaces the actual one. In so doing, a reductionist reading often turns earlier theorists into "naive" realists.[48] But even theorists, like Rodowick, who are concerned precisely with an epistemological definition of post-filmic cinema, restrict themselves more or less to the first level of a technological-ontological debate on both media, and set apart the indexical-analog motion picture image from the abstract-computational pixel image, whose referential relation to the world is endangered at the very least.[49]

The fact that the realism discussion focuses so strongly on the first level with regard to moving images is certainly related to the enormous change that digital technology has brought about for the creation and diffusion of images. Furthermore, the dominance of structuralism and poststructuralism from the 1960s through the 1980s, and of theories of postmodernity in the 1990s, meant that debating realism largely fell into neglect. Its re-emergence in the debate on digital images seems to be much influenced by a turning away from

questions of representation; instead, realism is now approached as a phenomenon of sheer immersive presence (which perhaps helps explain the increased interest in phenomenological approaches). Against the background of images lacking reference, which entails a loss of credibility, reducing the debate to the perfecting and imitating of the photographic effect, which is often projected onto digital pictorial practice as its sole objective, seems to amount to affirming the existence of the real.

The "reality promise" of moving images – whether analog or digital – cannot, however, be discussed exclusively in terms of their technological contingencies, since it continues cultural (Western) attributions present in iconic and literary "constellations" since late antiquity.[50] Although they are historically changeable poles, two very different conceptions concurrently claim to attend upon this reality promise: the "long-standing practice of illusionism in the cinema" continues to stand opposed to the association of photographic (moving) images with their evidentiary function and authenticity status.[51] Both conceptions produce their own kind of presence effects, contingently involving production and reception, and create imaginary projections of the world. Even though two different pragmatic-logical conceptions or stances are thus confronted, we can nevertheless understand these as creations of fictional probability as opposed to factual truth claims, and analyse the blurring of their boundaries[52] (which refers to the second, above-mentioned level of realism). Obviously, both "realistic" world projections – to their extreme poles – are always perspectivised, subjectivised, and narrated – not only by enunciation but also by spectators (this concerns the third level of the medium and shaping the world). While this point is banal, I find it worth reiterating given the myth of transparency: the indexicality of "pointless details" is ultimately an effect of using media to fashion the world. Just as the "truth [of a particular representation] cannot be confined or tested by agreement with the 'world'," as Goodman has shown,[53] we cannot measure the realistic effect against (supposedly) causal pictorial referenciality. Neither physiological nor photographic perception, nor indeed realism are transhistorically valid concepts but instead changeable conventions.[54] For Jakobson and Barthes, the breaking of norms inheres in realistic movements, and involves the renewal and revitalisation of the reality effect, especially by means of "pointless details" and the heightened attention to objects. It bears the potential of both a shift of perception through media and of critical reflection on the construction of such effects and the corresponding discourses. This leads beyond the technological level of the media change we are currently witnessing. The theoretical debate on the construction of realistic worlds and their specific cinematic and digital transmission (or fashioning) can no more than benefit from the differentiated perspective of a history of theory to explore the contingent imaginary of a mediated reality and its *topoi*. And if we assume, as Jameson claims, that all realisms since modernity bear witness to a paradoxical relation between authenticity and self-reflection,[55] then the problem of the referential credibility of moving images definitely proves to be a pragmatic-ethical question rather than a technological one.[56]

Notes

Translated by Mark Kyburz.

[1] J. Schweinitz has discussed the media foundation myth of total immersion, as staged in science fiction films in the 1990s and as debated in theories of virtual reality. See his *Totale Immersion und die Utopien von der virtuellen Realität. Ein Mediengründungsmythos zwischen Kino und Computerspiel*, in B. Neitzel, R. F. Nohr (eds.), *Das Spiel mit dem Medium. Partizipation – Immersion – Interaktion*, Schüren, Marburg 2006, pp. 136-153.

[2] V. R. Schwartz, *Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in fin-de-siècle Paris*, in L. Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, Rudgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ 1995, pp. 87-113. Tom Gunning makes similar points about early film in *An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator (1989)*, in L. Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, cit., pp. 114-133.

[3] For a discussion of the lesser known arguments advanced in this respect in the debate on the cinema especially in Germany in the 1910s, see H. H. Diederichs (ed.), *Geschichte der Filmtheorie. Kunsttheoretische Texte von Méliès bis Arnheim*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2004; J. Schweinitz (ed.), *Prolog vor dem Film. Nachdenken über ein neues Medium, 1909-1914*, Reclam, Leipzig 1992; A. Kaes (ed.), *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929*, dtv, Munich 1978; and H.-B. Heller, *Literarische Intelligenz und Film: zu Veränderungen der ästhetischen Theorie und Praxis unter dem Eindruck des Films 1910-1930 in Deutschland*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1985. On the discussion in France, see D. Banda, J. Moure (eds.), *Le Cinéma: Naissance d'un art 1895-1920*, Flammarion, Paris 2008.

[4] T. Elsaesser, *Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time*, in T. Elsaesser, K. Hoffmann (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 1998, pp. 200-222, esp. p. 202.

[5] J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 1999; M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, Routledge-Kegan Paul, London 1964.

[6] See, for instance, F. Léger, *A New Realism – The Object* (1926), in L. Jacobs (ed.), *Introduction to the Art of the Movies*, The Noonday Press, New York 1960, pp. 96-98; see also G. Dulac, *L'Essence du cinéma – l'idée visuelle* (1925), in P. Hillairet (ed.), *Écrits sur le cinéma 1919-1937*, Paris Expérimental, Paris 1994, pp. 62-67.

[7] See L. Eisner, *L'Écran démoniaque*, André Bonne, Paris 1952.

[8] S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films. Die Errettung der äusseren Wirklichkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1985, pp. 65f., 77-79 (my translation). Similarly, see J. Epstein, *Le Délire d'une machine* (1946), in Id., *Esprit de cinéma*, Jeheber, Geneva-Paris 1955, pp. 168-179; on Epstein, see further M. Tröhler: *Die sinnliche Präsenz der Dinge oder: die skeptische Versöhnung mit der Moderne durch den Film*, in C. Kiening (ed.), *Mediale Gegenwärtigkeit*, Chronos, Zurich 2007, pp. 283-306.

[9] J. Schweinitz, "Zu Grundlagen des filmtheoretischen Denkens Siegfried Kracauers," in *Beiträge zur Film- und Fernsehwissenschaft*, no. 29-34, 1988, pp. 111-126, esp. p. 116 (my translation).

[10] S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films*, cit., pp. 40f., 76-77 (my translation); see also J. Epstein, *Le Cinéma du diable* (1947), in P. Leprohon (ed.), *Écrits sur le cinéma 1921-1947*, Seghers, Paris 1974, vol. 1, pp. 335-410, esp. pp. 383-384.

[11] S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films*, cit., pp. 138-140 (my translation).

[12] H. Tannenbaum, *Probleme des Kinodramas* (1913-14), in J. Schweinitz (ed.), *Prolog vor dem Film*, cit., pp. 312-325, esp. p. 313f. (my translation).

[13] S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films*, cit., pp. 46, 95, 109 (my translation).

[14] S. Kracauer, *Kult der Zerstreuung* (1926), in K. Witte (ed.), *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1974, p. 317; S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films*, cit., p. 75. See also J. Schweinitz, "Zu Grundlagen des filmtheoretischen Denkens Siegfried Kracauers," cit., pp. 117-120 (my translations).

[15] J. Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma*, Sirène-Maeght Éditeur, Paris 1921, pp. 104-105, and Id., *Le Délire d'une machine*, cit., p. 179 (my translations).

[16] B. Balàzs, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (1924), in H. H. Diederichs (ed.), *Schriften zum Film*, Henschel, Berlin 1982, vol. 1, pp. 45-143, esp. p. 66 (my translation).

[17] H. Loewy, *Béla Balázs – Märchen, Ritual und Film*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 2003, p. 12 (my translation). Similarly yet already earlier, see W. Serner, *Kino und Schaulust* (1913), in J. Schweinitz (ed.), *Prolog vor dem Film*, cit., pp. 208-213.

[18] See F. Kessler, *Photogénie und Physiognomie*, in R. Campe, M. Schneider (eds), *Geschichten der Physiognomik*, Rombach, Freiburg im Breisgau 1996, pp. 515-534, esp. p. 52; B. Balázs quoted in H. Loewy, *Béla Balázs – Märchen, Ritual und Film*, cit., p. 30: "The gaze allows *life itself* to 'shine through' phenomena, just like through an opaque image" (my translation).

[19] B. Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch*, cit., p. 103.

[20] É. Faure, *Le Cinéma, langue universelle* (1935), in Id., *De la cinéplastique*, Nouvelles Éditions Séguier, Paris 1995, pp. 39-45, esp. p. 45 (my translation).

[21] É. Faure, *De la cinéplastique* (1920), in Id., *De la cinéplastique*, cit., pp. 7-38.

[22] F. Kessler, *Photogénie und Physiognomie*, cit., pp. 521 and 527 (my translation).

[23] R. Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (1932), Hanser, Munich 1974, pp. 68-69 (my translation). See also F. Léger, *A New Realism – The Object*, cit., p. 97.

[24] R. Arnheim, *Tauberton und Studio* (1930), in H. H. Diederichs (ed.), *Rudolf Arnheim: Kritiken und Aufsätze*, Hanser, Munich-Vienna 1977, pp. 223-225, esp. p. 224 (my translation).

[25] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York 1968, pp. 246-247, fn. 11. See also B. Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch*, cit., p. 66.

[26] On cinematic realism as a "utopia of the aesthetic," see H. Kappelhoff, *Realismus: Das Kino und die Politik des Ästhetischen*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 2008.

[27] S. Kracauer, *Theorie des Films*, cit., pp. 61-65; R. Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, cit., p. 69; R. Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, in A. Frisé (ed.) *Gesammelte Werke*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1978, vol. 1, chapter 4; see also his *Ansätze zu neuer Ästhetik. Bemerkungen zu einer Dramaturgie des Films* (1925), in A. Frisé (ed.) *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., vol. 2., pp. 1137-1154 (my translations).

[28] J.-P. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire* (1940), Gallimard, Paris 1986, p. 51; L. Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1998.

[29] C. Metz, *L'Énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film*, Méridiens Klincksieck, Paris 1991.

[30] J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, cit., pp. 22-23, 28; L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.-London 2001, pp. 192-195.

[31] L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, cit., p. 196.

[32] See B. Flückiger, *Visual Effect: Filmbilder aus dem Computer*, Schüren, Marburg 2008, pp. 334-356; J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation*, cit., pp. 41-44; L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, cit., p. 197f.

[33] W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.-London 1994, p. 27.

[34] R. Barthes, *L'Effet de réel* (1968), in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, Seuil, Paris 2002, vol. 3, pp. 25-32 (my translation). To be precise, while Mitchell discusses this transfer from literature to photography at first as a widespread belief in the indexicality of analog photography, he subsequently establishes the difference to digital photography quite succinctly: "The referent has come unstuck," W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, cit., p. 31.

[35] R. Barthes, *L'Effet de réel*, cit., pp. 26-30 (my translation and emphasis, including the subsequent

citation, p. 174). See also R. Jakobson, *Über den Realismus in der Kunst* (1921), in E. Holenstein, T. Schelbert (eds.), *Poetik: Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1921-1971*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1979, pp. 129-139.

[36] R. Barthes, *Le Message photographique* (1961), in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 1120-1133, esp. pp. 1121-1123; R. Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (1980), in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 785-894, esp. p. 854 (my translations).

[37] See R. Barthes, *La Chambre claire*, cit., pp. 811, 822, 842 (my translation). Although Barthes at the end of his life privileged the subjective and emotional components of photography, he considered "studium" and "punctum" to be still "co-present"; *Idem*, p. 822. Philip Rosen, whose reading of Barthes focuses strongly on the indexicality and historicity of the detail, emphasises this co-presence and understands Barthes's realism "as a contested mode of sociality"; see his *Change Mummified. Cinema, Historicity, Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 2001, esp. p. 176.

[38] T. Gunning, *What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs*, in K. Beckman, J. Ma (eds.), *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, Duke University Press, Durham 2008, pp. 23-40, esp. pp. 36-37.

[39] See further B. Flückiger, *Visual Effect: Filmbilder aus dem Computer*, cit., pp. 289-312.

[40] T. Elsaesser, *Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time*, cit., p. 207. See also T. Gunning, *What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs*, cit., p. 25.

[41] Incidentally, the transfer that many scholars readily establish between the indexical quality of photography and the *moving* cinematic image doesn't embrace with enough emphasis the "reality of the movement." However, already Metz argues that it is the perception of the ongoing cinematic movement that provokes the "impression of reality" and of a living presence as an *effect of the imaginary power of the cinematic image*; see his *À propos de l'impression de réalité au Cinéma*, in Id., *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Klincksieck, Paris 1968, vol. 1, pp. 13-24.

[42] See, among others, B. Flückiger, *Visual Effect: Filmbilder aus dem Computer*, cit., p. 299. In this respect, D. N. Rodowick speaks of the "paradoxes of perceptual realism"; see his *The Virtual Life of Film*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.-London 2007, pp. 99-107.

[43] J. Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*, Paris, Éditions Galilée 1981.

[44] See P. Geimer, *Was ist kein Bild? Zur 'Störung der Verweisung'*, in P. Geimer (ed.), *Ordnungen der Sichtbarkeit: Fotografie in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002, pp. 313-341; K. Hoffmann, *I See, if I Believe It – Documentary and the Digital*, in T. Elsaesser, K. Hoffmann (eds.), *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?*, cit., pp. 159-166.

[45] F. Kittler, *Computergrafik. Eine halbtechnische Einführung*, in H. Wolf (ed.), *Paradigma Fotografie, Suhrkamp*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, pp. 178-194; S. Krämer, *Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat*, in Id. (ed.), *Medien – Computer – Realität: Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und Neue Medien*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 73-94; S. Cubitt, "The Cinema of Attractions," in *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, no. 2-3, 2007, pp. 275-286; A. Quintana, *Virtuel? À l'heure du numérique, le cinéma est toujours le plus réaliste des arts*, Cahiers du cinéma, Paris 2008, p. 52. Also note Thomas Elsaesser's stand against the teleological assumption of "optimisation as a driver of audiovisual media culture" in film historiography; see his *Die "Neue Filmgeschichte" und das frühe Kino*, in Id., *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino: Archäologie eines Medienwandels*, text + kritik, Munich 2002, pp. 20-46, esp. pp. 38-39.

[46] See respectively J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation*, cit., p. 34 and Alejandro Adams, quoted in N. Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, Wallflower Press, London-New York 2009, p. 81. See further B. Flückiger, *Visual Effect: Filmbilder aus dem Computer*, cit., p. 341.

[47] See, among others, W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, cit., pp. 23-31; L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, cit., pp. 185-195; J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation*, cit., pp. 25-28; A. Quintana, *Virtuel? À l'heure du numérique, le cinéma est toujours le plus réaliste des arts*, cit., pp. 28, 36; S. Richter, *Digitaler Realismus: Zwischen Computeranimation und Live-Action*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2008, pp. 37-40.

[48] See especially Schweinitz's criticism of those scolars who use Bazin's "Myth of total cinema" to sustain their argument for immersion. See his *Totale Immersion und die Utopien von der virtuellen Realität*, cit., pp. 141-144.

[49] D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, cit., pp. 110-124.

[50] S. Richter, *Digitaler Realismus: Zwischen Computeranimation und Live-Action*, cit., p. 183, in relation to Volker Wortmann's work.

[51] T. Elsaesser, *Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time*, cit., pp. 204-209; see also T. Gunning, *What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs*, cit., p. 31f.

[52] See for instance C. Plantinga, "Defining Documentary: Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Projected Worlds," in *Persistence of Vision*, no. 5, 1987, pp. 44-54; B. Nichols, *The Fact of Realism and the Fiction of Objectivity* (1991), in J. Orr, O. Taxidou (eds.), *Post-War Cinema and Modernity: A Film Reader*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2005, pp. 188-207.

[53] N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1976, quoted in B. Flückiger, *Digitaler Realismus: Zwischen Computeranimation und Live-Action*, cit., p. 288.

[54] See R. Jakobson, *Über den Realismus in der Kunst*, cit.

[55] See F. Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, Routledge, New York-London 1990, p. 165f.

[56] See for instance also D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, cit., p. 145.